

Republicans are likely to rule the Washington state Senate

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Seattle pi

A concerted effort by Gov. Jay Inslee, Democrats, labor unions, environmentalists and a California billionaire has apparently failed to wrest control of the Washington state Senate from the hands of the Republicans and one dissident Democrat.



State Sen. Doug Ericksen, R-Ferndale (left), industry ally and chief critic of Gov. Jay Inslee's carbon reduction program, is re-elected.

Four major challenges to incumbents were apparently defeated, although one Senate seat on the Eastside is close enough that Washington's days-long vote count will have to be watched.

A coalition of 23 Republicans and two dissident Democrats seized control of the Legislature's upper house in 2013. A Republican captured a Democratic-held Senate seat in a special election later that year.

With Republicans running the show, the Senate wrote a hold-the-line budget and yielded on a few social programs, notably the DREAM act, extending eligibility for state scholarship aid to undocumented young people who have lived most of their lives in Washington.

But the Republican-run Senate and Democratic-run House have been at odds over a state transportation plan that Washington badly needs. The House passed its version. The Senate has not mustered a majority for any plan.

The returns from Tuesday night:

— In the 28th District, south Pierce County, conservative appointee Steve O'Ban holds 54.75 percent of the vote to 45.25 percent for Democratic challenger Rep. Tami Green.

– The 30th District saw Democrat-turned-Republican Mark Miloscia, a former House member, take 56.47 percent of the vote to 43.53 percent for Democrat Shari Song. A crude website attack on Miloscia’s Catholic faith, although Song immediately asked that it be taken down, rebounded in the Republican’s favor.



Contentious, controversial state Sen. Pam Roach — once thrown out of the Republican caucus — wins re-election in her rural district.

– Dissident Democratic Sen. Tim Sheldon of the 35th District, Mason and part of Thurston County, once again held off regular Democrats’ efforts to unseat him. Sheldon votes with Republicans in the Legislature and endorses them for state office. In turn, the GOP went all out for him this year. Sheldon has 54.46 percent of the vote to 45.44 percent for Democrat Irene Bowling.

– Sen. Doug Ericksen, R-Ferndale, a defender of oil trains and ally of refiners, ran away with his re-election race in the 42nd District, which embraces most of Whatcom County but was gerrymandered to cut out most of liberal Bellingham. Ericksen has almost 60 percent of the vote, besting Democrat Seth Fleetwood.

– Sen. Andy Hill, R-Redmond, the Republicans’ chief budget writer, has a smaller lead over Democratic challenger Matt Isenhower in the 45th District, which includes Redmond and Kirkland. Hill is at 52.89 percent, Isenhower at 47.11 percent.

Gov. Inslee was out stumping for Isenhower over the weekend. With money from California’s “green billionaire” Tom Steyer, the Washington Conservation Voters worked the district. The 45th District’s Democratic organization received help from Seattle Democrats.

Hill built up a war chest of almost \$900,000, most of it from business and industry. He also received possibly illegal help in the form of an email plug from Lake Washington Youth Soccer, a tax-exempt 501(3)(c) non-profit that is explicitly forbidden by IRS rules from engaging in partisan political activity.

Tom Steyer ended up putting more than \$1 million into his NextGen Climate Action PAC in Washington. It appears that the former hedge fund manager has realized no return on his political investment.

By contrast, the refiners and proposed builders of a coal export terminal north of Bellingham can toast Ericksen, who has received more free lobbyist meals and entertainment than any other lawmaker in Olympia.

The Legislature is under orders from the state Supreme Court to come up with an estimated \$4 billion to fully fund K-12 public education in the state.

Two other notes on the Senate: Contentious, controversial Republican Sen. Pam Roach was winning over a fellow Republican, Rep. Cathy Dahlquist, in the 31st District of rural King and Pierce counties.

While losing their bid for control, Democrats elected a potential caucus star to the Senate. She is Pramila Jayapal, the person who thought up Seattle's "Hate Free Zone" theme after 9/11, a former director of One America and co-chair of Seattle Mayor Ed Murray's panel that screened Seattle police chief candidates.

Senate Republicans hold to the mantra of no-new-taxes, no-new-revenue measures. House Democrats hold the line against cuts in programs to aid the poor and disadvantaged.

The Legislature may be in for a long 2015 session.